THE COUNCIL OF
ATLANTIC PREMIERS
LE CONSEIL DES PREMIERS
MINISTRES DE L'ATLANTIQUE

Working Together for Atlantic Canada

An Action Plan for Regional Cooperation

Report on Year Two
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Report on Year Two of the Council of Atlantic Premiers' Action Plan for Regional Cooperation

Introduction

In 2001, the Council of Atlantic Premiers released *Working Together for Atlantic Canada: An Action Plan for Regional Cooperation 2001-2003*. The Action Plan builds on over three decades of intergovernmental cooperation. In May of 2000, the Council of Maritime Premiers was expanded with the addition of Newfoundland and Labrador, creating the Council of Atlantic Premiers (CAP). The creation of CAP provided the impetus for a new regional agenda which would provide benefits to all Atlantic provinces. *Working Together for Atlantic Canada* identifies a number of initiatives to improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of public services to Atlantic Canadians, and strengthen the economic competitiveness of the region. In 2002, *Report on Year One* was released which highlighted successes in the first year of implementation of the Plan. This report highlights the major accomplishments achieved in the second year of implementation.

Improving the Quality, and Cost-Effectiveness of Public Service to Atlantic Canadians

Education

➢ **Literacy**

Improving literacy skills is a key priority for Atlantic departments of education. Under the auspices of the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF), initiatives were undertaken to improve literacy skills for both English- and French-language students. In the English sector, departments of education targeted elementary and middle-level students by:

- ⇨ creating an assessment kit to assist teachers in identifying the reading levels of students in Grades 4-6 and to provide samples of student work at various levels of performance (a similar kit is being developed for students in French immersion); and
- ⇨ developing a teacher's handbook that will contain 'how to' strategies to enable teachers to assist all grade 7-9 students in all disciplines improve their reading skills.

Seven booklets were developed to support reading literacy for French-language students. In 2003, the final three booklets targeted at community leaders, libraries and pre-schools were printed and distributed. The booklets strengthen the relationship between school, home and the community by illustrating how all sectors can work together to improve reading skills of Atlantic Canadian school children.

➢ **Student Services**

Atlantic departments of education are committed to improving the quality of education for all students including students with exceptionalities. Teachers in Atlantic Canadian classrooms expressed a need for innovative and effective strategies to assist them in responding to the many needs of today's inclusionary classroom. Therefore, departments of education are developing two resources, *Meeting Behavioural Challenges: Creating Safe and Caring Learning Environments* and *Partners in Action: A Guide to Collaborative Consultation*. These resources will assist teachers to address many behaviour challenges, and respond to the numerous social and psychological needs of students.

➢ **On-line Education**

In 2003, the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF) signed an agreement with the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) to develop French language on-line courses in economics, tourism, accounting and entrepreneurship. These high school courses will be accessible to students throughout the region via the internet. They will enable students to develop entrepreneurial skills, thereby contributing to the well-being of their community and the overall region. By offering these courses on-line, students who live in rural areas will be provided with additional choices to assist them in completing their high school requirements.

➢ **Community Colleges**

Atlantic colleges continue to contribute to the development of the skilled human capital essential for economic growth and competitiveness within the region. However, with a small population base dispersed over a large geographic area, colleges benefit from working cooperatively to improve access, choice, and mobility for students throughout the region. In 2002, the Atlantic community college presidents and the ministers responsible for community colleges formally established the Atlantic Provinces Community College Consortium (APCCC) to foster cooperation and collaboration among the community colleges. Over the last year, APCCC undertook several regional initiatives to improve access to college programs, respond to the training needs of industry, and to strengthen the relationship with education and industry. Some of APCCC's specific achievements include:

- ⇨ collaborating with the regional Labour Market Information and Skills Committee in hosting a construction sector labour market symposium on November 6-7, 2003 in Moncton, NB;
- ⇨ signing a Memorandum of Understanding Creating the Atlantic Colleges Tourism Education Consortium (ACTEC) which will spearhead regional cooperation among the colleges' tourism education and training departments; and
- ⇨ establishing an Atlantic colleges' task force on mobility and transferability among the region's community colleges.

➢ **Labour Market Information and Skills**

An Atlantic Construction Symposium was held on November 6 and 7, 2003, to address issues such as the need to understand and plan for the ever-changing regional workforce

and recent and impending skill shortages in the construction industry. Symposium participants put forth a number of recommendations for consideration by provincial officials recognizing the need for regional planning and partnerships between industry, training institutions, and governments to ensure that the Atlantic region has the skilled workforce it needs for economic and social prosperity. The theme of the Symposium was "Atlantic Provinces Working Together to Build Our Future." Main discussion topics were: Learning and Training, Recruitment and Retention and Forecasting and Planning.

Health

➢ **Common Drug Review Process**

The Atlantic Common Drug Review Process was established to implement a unified drug review process for Atlantic Canada. Since 2002 the Atlantic Expert Advisory Committee has made 86 recommendations. In September 2003, the Atlantic Common Drug Review Process was merged with the National Drug Review. This will ensure consistency of standards on a nation-wide basis. The Atlantic Common Drug Review Committee will continue to address drug submissions that are not part of the National Drug Review mandate.

➢ **Health Human Resource Planning**

To control costs and improve efficiency in the health care sector, Atlantic governments agreed to create a regional information base of health service providers and health education programs to determine the most cost-effective method of ensuring the required number and mix of health care practitioners.

Under the direction of the deputy ministers responsible for health and post-secondary education, the Atlantic Health Human Resource Association (AHHRA) was incorporated to centrally manage the Atlantic Health Education Training Planning Study. This study will create a regional information base that will enable better planning with educational institutions regarding the numbers of health care professionals that are trained, along with better policies and practices in the areas of recruitment, funding, and accountability for education/training of health disciplines. Funding from provincial and federal governments has been secured.

The project, to be completed by March 2005, will provide valuable information to employers, and the health and education sectors in fulfilling future health human resource needs.

➢ **Health Infostructure Atlantic**

Health Infostructure Atlantic (HIA) is a perfect example of how the four provinces can work together to improve the delivery of health care services. HIA has just completed a Project Portfolio that was jointly funded by the four Atlantic provinces and Health Canada under the Canada Health Infostructure Partnership Program. The HIA Project Portfolio focused on three major areas across the region: teleradiology; common client registry; and, case management.

HIA provides a forum for sharing health information technology initiatives, identifying projects and strategies for collaborative development, and developing common standards. The transfer of digital images and information across provincial boundaries for referral and consultation is one of the benefits resulting from this regional approach.

In support of HIA, a secretariat was established to assist in the development of a strategic plan and business plans. The secretariat will also coordinate and communicate common Atlantic positions at national forums.

➢ **Health Promotion Research Centre**

In 2003, the Health Promotion Research Centre continued with its mission of conducting and facilitating health promotion research that influences policy and contributes to the health and well-being of Atlantic Canadians. The five-year MOU signed in 2001 by the Centre, Dalhousie University and the four Atlantic departments of health is currently in its third year.

The Centre's priorities for 2003-04 include launching grants for the Atlantic Centre for Research Development and for Stroke Knowledge Translation, hosting an Atlantic Health Promotion Research Forum and continuing to build capacity for research in Atlantic Canada through forums, strategic planning meetings, workshops, presentations and research consultations. Other Centre accomplishments are seen in its research products, organizational and national level work, the employment of staff and students, training of faculty and students, the number of requests for research findings, a website and newsletter, and the housing of a Canada Research Chair in Health Promotion at the Centre.

The Centre has also endeavored to increase the levels of research and program activity in Atlantic Canada and in each province over the period of the MOU. The Centre has built a productive working relationship within the university and public sectors and has identified the needs and priorities of the provinces and the region. The Centre continues to manage ongoing projects, and make application for new ones.

Strengthening the Region's Economic Competitiveness

Research and Innovation

With the adoption of the Action Plan in 2001, Atlantic premiers committed to build the region's research and innovation capacities, increase the regional share of national research and innovation funding, and, in partnership with the federal government, foster a climate of innovation and pursue an Atlantic Canada innovation framework. Provinces have jointly made significant progress in the two following areas:

⇨ established liaison with the federal government, and secured commitments for post-secondary research and innovation program support; and

- ⇨ secured funds from the federal government to conduct a policy examination and business case for the development of an Atlantic Canada Innovation Policy Framework.

Harmonized Trucking Strategy

Atlantic provinces are working to cut red tape and reduce business barriers in the trucking industry by developing a harmonized trucking strategy. This strategy includes the harmonization of regulations and requirements for vehicle weights and dimensions. The recommendations of the *Harmonized Trucking Strategy for Atlantic Canada: Assessment of Potential* have been reviewed by all four provinces and work is ongoing to implement priority items by 2005.

Building on the success of the harmonization of weights and dimension regulations for common configurations, particular attention has been directed to the further harmonization for oversize and overweight vehicles. Consultations were undertaken with industry on oversize loads and on pilot car training and certification. Eighteen public meetings were held throughout the Atlantic provinces last year by the Council of Deputy Minister's Task Force on Vehicle Weights and Dimensions Policy. The information gathered from stakeholders at those meetings formed the basis of discussion papers which will contribute to the development of further harmonized approaches.

Atlantic Procurement

Atlantic governments are working towards the renewal of the existing 1996 procurement agreement. This renewed agreement will promote general confidence in public sector procurement by proposing a new regional barrier-free zone, reciprocity in public procurement, a regional response to actions by other jurisdictions, and promoting awareness of Atlantic capabilities (i.e., regional supplier development). The new agreement will be presented to premiers for signature in 2004.

The renewed procurement agreement will be in addition to the progress achieved since 2001 with the development of standard terms and conditions for bidders, which are available on-line. The intent is to establish common procurement practices in the region, providing vendors with one set of rules for selling to government.

Immigration

In 2002, the Council of Atlantic Premiers identified immigration as one of the keys to improving Atlantic Canadian economic competitiveness. An immigration working group was established to undertake, as a first step, an environmental scan of current structures, initiatives, and activities in each province. A report on the environmental scan is being prepared which will outline a number of recommendations for consideration by premiers.

Equity Capital Financing in Atlantic Canada

In the summer of 2003, Grant Thornton LLP conducted a study on behalf of the Council of Atlantic Premiers to assess the demand, supply and cost of capital financing for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Atlantic Canada. The study indicated that both

businesses and suppliers expressed the need for greater education and increased awareness of equity capital financing, as well as equity capital financing options for small- and medium-sized businesses in Atlantic Canada. Businesses identified the two most imposing constraints to economic growth in the Atlantic region as access to capital for growth, and, access to operating capital. The report also identified four possible areas for government action: providing more education to provide awareness; developing policy positions; harmonizing regulations; and exploring innovative ways to increase the availability of equity capital. Premiers will explore further collaboration in this area.

Conclusion

Atlantic governments are extremely pleased with the progress of the implementation of the regional Action Plan. Some of the initiatives identified in the Action Plan will continue and Atlantic premiers are committed to implement these initiatives. It is also recognized that further cooperation in public policy areas will be vital to ensure that public services rendered to Atlantic Canadians are conceived and delivered in the most cost efficient and economic manner.

The accomplishments outlined in this report will serve as the framework to identify additional key areas of cooperation, forming the basis of a strategic direction for the Council of Atlantic Premiers. These will include measures to grow the regional economy and how to position Atlantic Canada vis-à-vis national issues affecting this region.